

Escape to La Suvera

Linger among Tuscany's golden hills at a hideaway most elegante: Relais La Suvera. BY LAURIE WERNER

Even in Tuscany, where the simplest of farmhouses seem like works of art, Relais La Suvera is a standout. This villa estate would be worth visiting just for its setting, but when you add in its pedigree, its singular furnishings, and the warmth of its owners, it becomes an experience so special that guests rarely visit just once. With reservations accepted year-round for a brief six-month season,

spring to fall, it's no surprise that many guests make their return reservations even before they check out.

SETTING

Befitting the fortress it was a thousand years ago, Relais La Suvera sits on a gentle hill with a Sienese countryside view of vineyards and poppy fields just above the hamlet of Pievescola. Its location is both remote and convenient: 18 miles west of Siena, 35 miles southwest of Florence, but in an area not overrun by tourists. Still, the high points of Tuscan sightseeing—besides Siena and Florence, hilltop towns like Monteriggioni, Volterra, and San Gimignano—are sprinkled through the surrounding terrain.

FIRST IMPRESSION

A towering wrought-iron gate affixed with the sign "Suvera XVI" (that's the century, not the address) opens onto a courtyard shaded by chestnut trees, scented by lavender plants, and patrolled by an occasional peacock in full-feather display—one of five resident here. Dominating the square is an ocher-stone vil-

la scalloped with loggias, home in the 16th century to Pope Julius II and now housing La Suvera's most opulent rooms. The other buildings ringing the courtyard—a 16th-century church and farm buildings from the 1700s—are of almond-colored stone and house simpler guest

rooms. A formal garden boasts statues carved during the Renaissance.

TELLING DETAILS

Guest rooms are named after aristocratic ancestors of La Suvera's owners, the Marchese Giuseppe Ricci and his wife, Principessa Eleonora Massimo, and after the styles of the furnishings (many priceless) on display. The Riccis, you'll learn, have a friendly relationship with their antiques—you'll find centuries-old ceramics, paintings, and silver pieces casually propped against the wall of a staircase or resting on a sideboard. They have a similar relationship with animals. Their cats—Napoleone, Cecilia, and Prospero—not only have their own room; they take the elevator instead of climbing stairs. Then there's the large black-mesh structure near the church. "It's a cage," says the marchese. "But we don't put birds in the cage. The cage is to say to the birds, 'it's so nice to be free.'"

CAST OF CHARACTERS: THE OWNERS

The Rome-based Riccis bought this house in the 1960s as their country estate. "My wife wanted a small house that could be taken care of easily," says the



Classic loggias serrate the facade of the 16th-century Papal Villa (right), La Suvera's main house. Views include a sampler of the estate's gardens—and Tuscany's storied landscape.



